[115 cont.]

436 money itself (1). The pieces of money seen and collected by

1. Edge-Partington, I, 165, Nos. 1, 2; 163, Nos. 2-4.

European travelers were all old, usually so old that the parrot-feather trimming had become insignificant or invisible and the specimens looked like old leather straps (2). During spe-

2. Coote, p. 155. Director Foy tells me that well-preserved, that is, new specimens are to be found in the museum in Cambridge.

[556] cial festivities the pieces belonging to the host are displayed at the place where the festivities are held. According to Codrington, there are also shorter pieces for daily use, but in former times shell money probably served for this purpose.
● [583] The bride price is paid exclusively in feather money (3).

3. Codrington, p. 239. Joest in Baessler, p. 379.

802 It is in keeping with the commercial talents of the natives that they can easily count up to 100,000, according to Joest. When they count with their hands, they compute with the fingers bent; thus the closed fist with the thumb tucked under means five, with one finger outstretched, four, and so forth. Joest did not find them counting with their feet (4). Markham mentions a sort of knotted string made of

4. Joest in Baessler, p. 393.

strips of palm leaf, which he interprets as a counting device. When the body of Bishop Patteson was returned, the string
[764] was found in the folds of the tapa in which the corpse was
000 wrapped. According to Markham's interpretation, the five

584 [141 cont.]
small initial payment makes the girl taboo, so that no other man
583 614 can buy her. In each case the final purchase of the woman is a
matter between the two kin groups [Sippen], that is, the totem
groups; not only the closest members, but all the male members
of the kin group demand their share of the purchase price, which
is always paid in feather money. It is therefore not rare that a
[584] betrothed couple must wait two years before they can marry be-
cause the kin group of the bridegroom is not yet able to pay the
584 purchase price. It seems that the bridegroom himself rarely takes
part in the negotiations; often he knows nothing about it at first.
Sometimes he is told that a girl has been chosen for him, and he
is admonished to avoid a certain house. He then guesses who his
chosen one is. Codrington mentions that often the bridegroom
[585] resists violently, even at the wedding, but he does not say whether
this is actually an aversion to the marriage or a ceremonial act.
We know nothing about the procedure of the wedding, but after-
591 wards the young husband takes his wife first to the house of his
father, until he builds his own home (4). In rarer cases no

4. Joest in Baessler, pp. 379, 381. Codrington, p. 239. O'Ferrall, pp. 223 f. According to F. de Tolna, Chez les Cannibales, p. 268, the people along the coast on Vanikoro buy wives from the people of the bush for a breast disk each.

[583] [628]

P36 engagement takes place, but the young man seduces a girl; in
583 that case, however, his kin group must pay the girl's kin group
595 whatever price is demanded (5). Polygamy depends upon the

5. Joest in Baessler, p. 383.

ability to pay (6).

6. Dillon, p. 305, says that "persons

/201 cont./

411 latter two implements also correspond to our spears in the black coloring of individual surfaces. One may conclude that spears must have occurred on the [708] Santa Cruz Islands in former times because of the duka sticks of the Reef island Matema (cf. below, p.116), whose upper parts have the form of spear points.]

524 411 /202/ It was possible for me to procure a stone-sling (Fig. 48). Nowadays, however, the sling seems to be kept only as a plaything; at any rate, I never heard that it was used in fighting (1).

[436] 1. [Among the amulets of the feather-money rolls (cf. above, p. 86, footnote 8) are found pointed oval forms that obviously are sling stones: Edge-Partington and Heape, I, 163, Nos. 6 and 7.]

Society and Family

584 According to my information, the father chooses the bride (2), [according to Joest and] according to Coombe, p. 189,

2. [Codrington also says this; cf. Ethn., I, p. 141.]

[583] the mother. Although in former times feather money had to be paid for the woman, nowadays tobacco may be substituted. A woman can be obtained for two boxes of tobacco, the local equivalent of about 14 pounds sterling. The bridegroom has little influence on the choice, especially since he is, of course,

/203 cont./

548 Nitendi (3), and are bought by a syndicate. A man may pay off
[583]

3. [Speiser, Südsee, p. 302.]

the other joint-owners of the woman, whereupon she becomes his legitimate wife. The prostitutes grant their favors in the compartments that are to be found in the corners of the men's houses (4).

4. [Cf. above, pp. 50 f.]

[307] They usually wear their hair short and are smeared all over with Curcuma (5).

5. [Joest reports the latter; cf. Ethn., I, p. 87.]

515 There is no club life comparable, for example, to the suque of the Banks Islands; there is scarcely anything like a secret
[535] society, and masked dances certainly do not take place, for otherwise one would know something about them. The information on the origin of the mask in Zürich (6) is doubtful.

6. [Ethn., I, pp. 145 f.]

765 [On burial customs (7) it should be mentioned that

7. [Ethn., I, pp. 146 f. Speiser, Südsee, p. 295.]

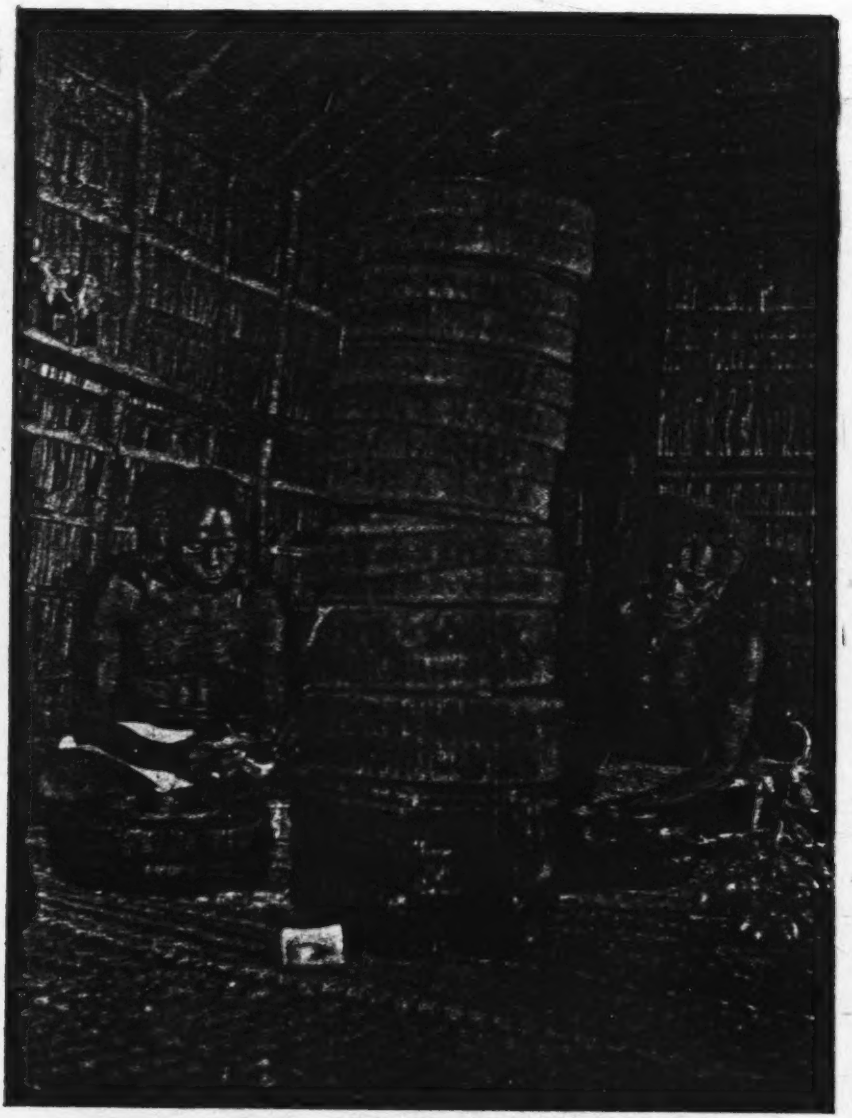
friends and relatives gather to mourn; they expect to be reim-
766 bursed with food and money (8).] Whereas for an ordinary man
[764]

8. [O'Ferrall, section "Round Houses." Coombe, p. 170.]

the funeral feast /204/ takes place after five days, for a "chief"

[i.e. - prostitutes--analyst]

436
583
516
291
342



[p94(A)]

3:Davenport E-6 (1958-1960)1962
ON13 Santa Cruz ON13

496
583

FEATHER-MONEY BRIDE PRICE is negotiated by the bride's father (*left*) and a relative. They have accepted nine of the ten required pieces, which are stacked between them. In bargaining over the tenth and least valuable, the bride's father has rejected

[p 94 (B)]

3:Davenport E-5 (1958-1960)1962
ON13 Santa Cruz ON13

436
583
126

the two pieces flanking the stack.[1] He had earlier demanded Australian currency (foreground) to supplement the bottom piece, which he considered not quite up to standard.[2] This photograph and the others that illustrate the article were made by the author.

[1] [These two pieces appear to be of black feathers in the original color photograph. Those in the stack range from dark red, on the bottom, to nearly colorless, on the top.–Analyst]

[p94 (c)]

3:Davenport E-5 (1958-1960)1962
ON13 Santa Cruz ON13

[p95(B)]

436 One of the most exotic kinds of money in the world today is a belt two inches wide and 30 feet long made of glue, fibers and feathers, particularly the downy red feathers plucked from the breast, head and back of a tropical forest bird. The red-feather currency of the Santa Cruz Islands of the southwest Pacific nonetheless fits the most rigorous definition of the term "money." It serves as a means of accumulating wealth and as a universal medium of exchange in the highly diversified commerce that flows among these islands. The currency itself is fully interchangeable, each belt having a precisely negotiable value in terms of other belts. Against the recent invasion of the Australian pound, moreover, the red-feather money has kept its integrity. It is still the only acceptable specie for the purchase of brides, fine pigs and certain forms of labor.

[237] [825] [556] [177] [583]

121 436 This improbable currency demonstrates that the use of money is not an economic sophistication limited to high civilizations. Many, but by no means all, primitive peoples have devised moneys of their own. Although the forms of the currencies are as diverse as any of man's inventions—running the gamut of animal, vegetable and mineral matter in the live, raw and processed states—the maintenance of these so-called primitive monetary systems requires the balancing of the same equation of supply and demand that confronts the U.S. Treasury and the Federal Reserve System.

435 436 121 If a currency is to serve as a common denominator of value, its value in turn must be carefully regulated. This is one of the most delicate operations in the management of a modern state. It involves adjustment of the demand for as well as supply of money, achieved by control over both the flow and the production of the currency. To a certain ex-

436
●583
516
291
285

[498 (E)]

EXCHANGING CURRENCY in the men's clubhouse, the man at the left is selling the piece in the center for the two that flank it.

EXAMINING CURRENCY offered in a bride price, the bride's family considers whether it is up to standard for its denomination.

3:Davenport E-S (1956-1960)1962
ON13 Santa Cruz ON13

2:Davenport E-5 (1958-1960)1962
ON13 Santa Cruz ON13

[487] [291] [482] ● 583 496

DELIVERING BRIDE PRICE, women parade from the groom's village to the bride's, showing off the feather currency along the way.

[342]

PREPARING BRIDE PRICE for delivery, the groom's family wraps each piece that has been selected in a new piece of cloth.

[749(E)]

463 to be more lucrative than another. The
[287] specialists plying each trade compete
[477] with one another, and the hereditary lines in each occupation are sufficiently numerous and dispersed so that no individual or small group can easily obtain a monopoly or control over the market.

436 Feather currency has absolutely no other use than as a medium of exchange, a standard of value and a store of wealth. It is not worn or displayed. In other words, it has no inherent usefulness; it is a true money. Yet it is produced and circulated in a free market, controlled only by supply and demand and by the principle of devaluation over
[458] time. Inflation is avoided, in spite of the constant issuance of new money, by the depreciation and withdrawal from circulation of old money.

435 The size and richness of color of a new piece of currency determine its
436 original value. These two criteria are reducible to the number of birds and the amount of labor that go into its manufacture. In addition to the down of 300 birds, the average piece embodies 500 or 600 man-hours of work by the three specialists. But the width and sometimes the length of a belt can vary. And the red hue can be more or less saturated depending on how much down was used or the extent to which the less admired orange feathers were discarded.

Depreciation comes with time from damage by vermin and molds as well as from the wear and tear of handling. Great care is taken to protect the currency. The double coils are wrapped tightly, first in a dried fan-palm leaf and then in many layers of bark cloth. Looking more like a bundle of rags than something of value, the coils are stored on a shelf under which the household fire is kept smoldering. The heat inhibits molds, the smoke keeps insects and other vermin away and the wrappings protect the money from smoke damage. In spite of these precautions, each piece of currency eventually deteriorates. When the last bit of color disappears, the belt is discarded.

The value of most currencies is referred ultimately to some standard; in the Santa Cruz Islands the standard is the unseemly combination of pigs and
●[583] marriage payments. The minimum payment made to the bride's family by the groom's kin at marriage—the bride price—always consists of 10 units of currency graduated in value from a new or nearly perfect No. 1 ("bottom") piece to a No. 10 ("top") piece, which is just above the threshold of no value. The

3:Davenport E-5 (1958-1960)1962
CN13 Santa Cruz CN13

435
436
[583]

negotiation of a bride price calls for a session of formalized bargaining, involving the close examination of each coil of currency. Everyone concerned has a clear idea of the range of quality appropriate to each of the 10 units. Thus the bride price supplies not only a basic standard for the value of feather money but also a scale of ideal images in terms of which the "denomination" of any piece of currency can be expressed.

The progression is not arithmetic but geometric: each piece is worth twice as much as the one below it on the scale. If a "top" piece is given an arbitrary value of one, then a No. 6 piece is worth 16 and a "bottom" piece is worth 512. These values are not explicit. No one says that a piece is "worth 128" but all understand that an ideal No. 6 belt has a par value of two No. 7 belts. In the terminology of the pig standard, the pieces from No. 1 to No. 5 are called

[7102(A)]

435 "porkers," because a pig suitable for a
436 feast can be bought with currencies in this range; pieces from No. 6 to No. 10 are called "sucklings," because they will buy only pigs too small to be eaten.
437 Except for the negotiation of bride
●[583] prices, there is remarkably little haggling over the price of any purchase. The buyer of a pig or canoe or taro roots offers what he considers a fair amount of
[626] currency, and the seller accepts. If the seller feels he has been underpaid, he can seriously damage the buyer's reputation by gossiping about the transaction and refusing to deal with him again.

435 As in the purchase of a bride, certain
436 other purchases must be made with specified pieces of high value. The seller
[437] has no obligation to "make change," so currency is exchanged ahead of time.
[463] This can be done by anyone, but some men who are particularly adept at

[+102 (B)]

3:Davenport E-S (1868-1960)1962
ON13 Santa Cruz ON13

438 could purvey her services as a prostitute, sell her outright or even kill her
[595] without fear of retaliation. None of these
[548] things could be done with wives. But since the purchase price of a concubine was 10 times higher than a bride price, selling a girl into concubinage had its attractions for many Reef Island families. The British Government has for-
[177] bidden the practice, but Reef Island
● [583] women still go south as wives. Their
[554] bride prices are the main source of currency for their home islands. An imported wife brings extra prestige to a Santa Cruz man, and bride prices for Reef women run about twice as high as they do for domestic wives.

The Duff Islanders get their feather currency not by selling women but by building large sailing canoes that carry on interisland traffic in passengers and cargo. The men of the Duffs do not en-
[437] gage in that traffic themselves; they sell
[505] the canoes for feather currency to the people of a few of the western Reef Islands, who in turn specialize in voyaging and trading throughout the islands. These mariners sail even to the southern islands of Utupua and Vanikoro in search of trade. The two islands are outside the feather-currency area, but their people until recently depended on the
[436] canoes to bring them the shell disks and lengths of woven cloth they used as currency. For these precious items they
[437] traded, at fixed rates, packets of red honey eater feathers, and these were resold on Santa Cruz to the makers of feather currency. In this manner the two different money systems became interlocked and interdependent, and the economies of north and south remain so today, even though there is no longer any traffic in currency materials.

177 Since the end of World War II the
436 Santa Cruz monetary system has come under pressure from the world outside. More and more Australian money has flowed into the islands; it circulates along with the feather currency and is completely interchangeable with it. Today the rate of exchange is roughly one shilling for a piece of feather money of minimum value. This makes the par value of a No. 1 piece 512 shillings, or about 25 Australian pounds. Figured in
[464] terms of labor (at the prevailing net wage rate for unskilled labor in the central Solomons, where most Santa Cruz men work at some point in their lives), the value of a new piece of currency is roughly comparable: about 20 to 24 pounds.

458 Plantation wages have nearly trebled
M7 since 1945. The great increase in the

458 177 quantity of Australian money within the Santa Cruz group has caused a precipitate fall in its value in terms of local [435] goods. Once a shilling bought 10 pounds of native tobacco; now it buys half a pound. During the same period, in an [438] effort to increase copra production by [648] channeling more islanders into plantation work, the colonial administration has taken steps that tend to depress interisland and intervillage trade in domestic products. Less feather currency [287] is needed and less is being produced. At the moment there are only five men on Santa Cruz who bind currency, whereas a decade ago there were more [583] than a dozen. Yet marriages go on as before, and men still refuse to marry off their daughters without receiving the traditional red-feather payment. Indeed, there is no area of the islands' economy in which confidence in the feather currency has been shaken. The [465] craft and agricultural specialists still demand red-feather money for their best products.

With the value of feather currency rising as it becomes scarcer and that of Australian money dropping as it becomes more abundant, the market [436] price of feather currency in Australian pounds has increased nearly 20 times in the past 15 years. Although it is recognised that 25 Australian pounds is the appropriate par value for a new piece of feather money, it takes considerably more than that to induce the currency [223] specialists to turn one out. This is, to [825] be sure, not true in the case of the bird snarers. As a result of the decreased production of feather money, the *Myzomela cardinalis* population has been increasing; the snarers can take birds more easily and in more accessible places and they would be willing to work for the old rates. But the labor involved in mak- [287] ing platelets and binding new currency has not diminished. Like skilled artisans anywhere, the specialists in these processes prefer to charge more and work less. In pricing their labor they are mindful not only of today's high market but also of the fact that the value of their product in Australian money is likely to be even greater as time passes. As a result the production of feather currency has now fallen behind even the currently reduced demand. As the "bad" Australian money drives out the "good" red-feather currency in accordance with Gresham's law, a simple society in the South Seas is experiencing a monetary crisis familiar to many more sophisticated economies.

higher the value of a piece of currency, the fewer there are; thus the rarity value increases with the value as determined by its condition. Translated in terms of our own money, it would be as if a ten-dollar bill was worth more than ten one-dollar bills because there are fewer of them in circulation. Unlike our money again, feather currency has no numerical units of value which permit easy and exact equivalencies to be made. Rather, the value of this exotic currency is not unlike that of precious gems, were they to be used as a medium of exchange. Each stone would be unique as to quality and size, and value could only be determined by recognized criteria of excellence plus the condition of the market. 435 436

Currency flows outward from its source throughout Santa Cruz Island and on to the Reef and Duff Islands in the north. These latter islands constitute areas of perennial shortage. Balancing this one-way flow of currency is a reverse movement of the most valuable commodity of all—women. The Reef Islands send out some of their women in exchange for bride prices paid in feather currency. Santa Cruz Island never sends its women abroad under any circumstances. Formerly, these women came to Santa Cruz both as wives and as concubines. The concubines were clearly distinguished from wives by the fact that they were shared by a group of men in a form of polyandry; they did no gardening or other domestic tasks normally assigned to women; and while they enjoyed a specially favored social position, they could be purveyed as prostitutes, sold outright, or even killed by the will of their owners alone. Bride prices for concubines were much higher than for ordinary wives—ten times higher to be exact. Due to government regulations, wives only are brought to Santa Cruz Island nowadays, but these are the prestigeful marriages, and their bride prices are larger than those of domestic unions. 438 [595] [548] [583] [554]

This one-way movement of women is correlated with an interesting population phenomenon. Santa Cruz Island population statistics reveal an abundance of males as compared with females of marriageable age, while in the Reef Islands the ratio is nearly even. This abundance of men is a phenomenon which has been noted in other Melanesian and New Guinea populations, but it has neither been investigated nor explained. [162]

The Duff Islands in the extreme northeast corner of the group come into the economic picture, not by sending out women, but by being specialists in making large sailing canoes in which cargos and passengers are transported interisland. These canoes are mainly sold to the Polynesian-speaking people of the small atolls of the Western Reef Islands who make their money by voyaging and trading throughout the group. Formerly, they sailed as far as the southern islands of Vanikoro and Utupua, ninety miles south of Santa Cruz Island. These islands depended upon receiving ground shell discs and special lengths of loom-woven fabric of banana fiber, specialties of certain districts of the Reef and Santa Cruz Islands, which were used as currency there. For these they traded feathers used on Santa Cruz Island for the making of feather currency. These shell and fabric currencies of Vanikoro and Utupua have no currency value in the island where they were made, and feather currency has no value in the former islands. [396] [505] [436] [184]

The Santa Cruz Group has a long history of contact with European civilization, beginning with Mendaña's second voyage in 1595. For the most part, however, the early contacts had little effect on the islanders, but were disastrous for the Europeans. Mendaña himself and many of his company died on Santa Cruz Island, Carteret lost some of his men there also when he attempted to land, La Perouse and his entire expedition perished on Vanikoro, and late in the nineteenth century Commodore Goodenough and a dozen Anglican missionaries, including one bishop, met death in several attempts to bring this island group within the confines of the British Empire and Christendom. 177

From 1900 onward the situation began to change. The few recruits who had gone away to work on plantations, and schoolboys who had gone away to mission schools returned [464]

4: Davenport E-5 (1958-1960) 1961 ON13 Santa Cruz ON13

they, for the time being at least, prefer to go out to work for wages rather than to stay home as the older men do. As a result of this, it takes nearly forty pounds to pay for all the materials and services required for a single piece of new feather currency. This is roughly equivalent to over one year's net earnings in the labor lines of a plantation. In effect, feather currency is being priced off the currency market. In contrast to the binders, the bird catchers are eager to work for old rates, for the lack of production of currency has seen a marked rise in the bird population. Birds are abundant in areas close at hand, and they are easy to catch. To the catchers, this means they do not have to work as hard or long to snare the required number for an order as they formerly did.

Despite this financial crisis, feather currency continues to be an absolute necessity in normal social relations. Most men are unwilling to marry off their daughters without receiving bride prices paid in the conventional manner. Pig breeders, too, demand payment in feather currency for fine animals that are to be used in maturation ceremonies, and the same feelings are held by the many turtle fishermen and the shark fishermen who furnish the special meat for ceremonial occasions. Nowhere has the confidence in feather currency been undermined. In fact, just the opposite realization—that it is becoming increasingly valuable—is what is at the bottom of the shortage. Since the currency is perishable, it cannot be hoarded indefinitely and retained as a kind of special purpose heirloom, to be exchanged only on ceremonial occasions. If present trends continue, then it must eventually disappear, and its functions will be assumed by the use of Australian money.

If one were to look casually at this situation, without knowledge of the internal dynamics, this would appear to be a simple instance of diffusion. A case in which a new element—Australian money—is replacing an old element on a one-for-one basis. It might seem like a simple choice situation, exactly like many others created by acculturation—a case where the native is choosing one object in preference for another according to some utilitarian scheme of values. One could even argue that the replacement is a rational economic choice based on the knowledge that one is convertible to the other, and one has the more general usage; therefore the more general one will be chosen. The apparent choice makes economic sense, too, for Australian money is not perishable, it cannot depreciate with age, and it is easier to carry, to use, and to exchange. All of these utilities are indeed recognized, but they have not shaken the traditional confidence in the indigenous currency.

This apparently simple case of change is analagous to kinds of monetary crises our own society has experienced when, during the bimetallic era, the relative values of gold and silver got out of hand; when various paper moneys were issued on hard currencies; and when international exchange rates between currencies fluctuated. In these situations, people always hang on to the more valuable currency, creating a scarcity, and taking it off the market. It seems, then, that Gresham's Law and the Doctrine of Bimetallic Flows are as applicable to this primitive monetary system as they are to civilized systems.

Yale University

NOTES

1. Bohannon, Paul, "The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy," Journal of Economic History, XIX, 491-503. 1959.

2. Field work in the Santa Cruz Group was carried out during 1958-60 as part of the Tri-Institutional Pacific Program (Bishop Museum, University of Hawaii, Yale University), supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.